

James L. Gelvin

# THE ISRAEL- PALESTINE CONFLICT

One Hundred Years  
of War

Third Edition



CAMBRIDGE



## THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Now in its third edition, James L. Gelvin's award-winning account of the conflict between Israelis and their forebears, on the one hand, and Palestinians and theirs, on the other, offers a compelling, accessible, and up-to-date introduction for students and general readers. Newly revised to take into account the effects of the 2010–11 Arab uprisings on the conflict and the recognition of Palestine as a “non-member observer state” by the United Nations, the book traces the struggle from the emergence of nationalism among the Jews of Europe and the Arab inhabitants of Ottoman Palestine through the present, exploring the external pressures and internal logic that have propelled it. Placing events in Palestine within the framework of global history, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* skillfully interweaves biographical sketches, eyewitness accounts, poetry, fiction, and official documentation into its narrative.

James L. Gelvin is Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History at the University of California, Los Angeles. A specialist in the modern social and cultural history of the Arab East, he is author of *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (1998), *The Modern Middle East: A History* (2004), and *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2012). He is also co-editor of *Global Muslims in the Age of Print and Steam, 1850–1930* (2013).



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**JAMES L. GELVIN**

*University of California, Los Angeles*



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a book about the creation, evolution, interaction, and mutual definition of two national communities. It is about the struggle between those two communities, the inner logic that has propelled that struggle, and the historical conditions that have delimited its course. If for no other reason than its persistence and its never-ending demand for attention, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle has earned its claim to uniqueness. By most other standards, however, it might be regarded as the quintessential struggle of the modern age. Either way, it is a story worth recounting.

Sometimes the struggle between the two national communities in Palestine has been submerged in wider struggles that embroiled outside powers. There was a time when it seemingly dropped off the radar screen altogether. For the forty-five years between 1948 and 1993, most of the world chose to regard the struggle for Palestine as an Arab-Israeli conflict, as if the claims of one of the principals in the struggle could be addressed by outside powers or simply written off. With the hindsight of history, we now know better. The Arab-Israeli conflict was but a phase in a struggle that has come full circle, and no peace between Israel and its sovereign neighbors will bring the struggle to an end. Only the principals can do that.

I have written this book for students and general readers who wish to understand the broad sweep of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and situate it in its global context. The book is not, nor was it intended to be, encyclopedic. It is interpretive. It is also concise and, hopefully, engaging. If I have neglected or been too cavalier with your favorite hero, event, or peace plan, I apologize in advance. You might want to take consolation from the fact that I have honed the narrative

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

you are about to read with care. You might also want to take consolation from the fact that, in return for the sacrifice of a few details, you are getting the occasional pearl. Where else are you going to find Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality slimmed down to a couple of paragraphs and written as if it were meant to be understood?

True believers on both sides of the struggle are, of course, beyond consolation. As you will soon see, I regard Zionism as a – perhaps the – prototypical nineteenth-century nationalist movement. I do not regard it as the fulfillment of Jewish history (as many of its adherents maintain), nor do I regard it as a “particularly virulent form of racism” (as its opponents have written). As a national movement, it is, to paraphrase Henry Fielding, no better than it should be. And yes, the word “Palestinian” does refer to a real nation, albeit one whose ancient lineage is as spurious as the ancient lineage of any other nation, and the word “Palestinian” can be used as a noun, not just as an adjective modifying the word “terrorist.” While it is the role of the true believer to believe, it is the role of the historian to treat the self-aggrandizing claims of any and all nationalist movements with skepticism. The same goes for the claims of their opponents. I only hope I have done so evenly and effectively.

Skeptics, like pioneers, get all the arrows. Thus, it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I list those who have contributed to my efforts. First off, there is Marigold Acland, my original editor at Cambridge University Press, who suggested I write this book even though I had stiffed her on another one. This is my penance. I also wish to thank others on the editorial side of this book: Eric Crahan, Isabelle Dambri-court, William M. Hammell, Pauline Ireland, Sarika Narula, and Sue Nicholas. Then there are those friends and colleagues who have read this or earlier versions of the book, made suggestions, or contributed in other ways: Carol Bakhos, David Dean Commins, Michael Cooperson, Kristen Hillaire Glasgow, Roya Klaidman, Ussama Makdisi, David N. Myers, A. Rantin Polemick, Manal Quota, and Jihad Turk. Finally, to this list I would like to add those undergraduates who read this book in its preliminary stages and graciously called my attention to every typo and misplaced comma, as well as those who raised questions that forced me to rewrite or rethink what I was trying to say. Once again, I wish to dedicate this book to them.

## THE LAND AND ITS LURE

The British short story writer Saki (H. H. Munro) once described the island of Crete as a place that has produced more history than could be consumed locally. The same might be said of Palestine, the region that includes the contemporary State of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The area in question is quite small. It stretches from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Jordan River in the east and from Lebanon in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Sinai Peninsula in the south. Israel in its commonly recognized borders is roughly the size of the state of New Jersey. And Israel comprises almost 80 percent of the territory designated “Palestine” after World War I. (As with most everything else pertaining to Palestine, there are those who would challenge even these simple assertions. According to right-wing Revisionist Zionists, whom we shall meet again later in our story, and [ironically] the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which we shall also meet again, Palestine includes the territory of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as well. Hence, the slogan of the latter group: “The road to Jerusalem begins in Amman.”)

The population of Palestine is also small. Israel’s population is about 7.8 million, smaller than the population of London or New York City. There are approximately 4.3 million Palestinians in the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) – a population a little larger than that of Los Angeles. (Although the exact figure is unknown, estimates for the total number of Palestinians in the world run as high as 9 million.) Since 1948, wars between Israel and its neighbors have claimed upwards of 150,000 casualties. These wars were certainly tragic, but they just as certainly pale in horror when compared with the most grievous squandering of lives in the region during its recent history.

## THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT



Map 1. Palestine and the Middle East.

In the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, there were 500,000 to 1 million dead and 1 million to 2 million wounded. Outside the region, there was the Bosnian war of 1992–5 (upwards of 250,000 dead), the 1994–5 genocide in Rwanda (500,000 to 850,000 dead), and the ongoing civil war in the Sudan (approximately 1.5 million dead from war and war-created famine).

The size of Palestine and the numbers directly affected by its political problems are thus minuscule in comparative terms. Nevertheless, the dispute between Israel, on the one hand, and the Palestinians and various Arab states, on the other, has been at the forefront of international attention for more than fifty years, and its roots stretch back more than a half century before that. Indeed, the dispute has gone on



Figure 1. Detail of 1892 topographic relief map of the “Holy Land,” from the coastal plain (foreground) to the Jordan depression. (Source: From the collection of the author)

for such a long time and has been the subject of so much heated debate that it is easy to lose sight of the fundamental issue involved. The problem is, simply put, a dispute over real estate. Jewish immigrants and their descendants, guided by the nationalist ideology of Zionism, and the Palestinian Arab inhabitants among whom the Zionists settled both claim an exclusive right to inhabit and control some or all of Palestine.

Perhaps the best place to start, then, is with a brief look at the real estate in question. At the center of the territory of Palestine is a range of hills stretching from Lebanon in the north to the Negev desert in the south. The hills are interrupted in the northern Galilee region by the Valley of Jezreel (Plain of Esdraelon). For millennia the Valley of Jezreel was a major trade route linking the Mediterranean and Egypt with southwest Asia. It also provided the path for conquerors, from the Assyrians to the Persians.

South of the Valley of Jezreel is a hilly area that was the center of the ancient Jewish settlement and is the site of Jerusalem. Today the plateau forms what the Palestinians call “the occupied West Bank” and what the

Israeli government calls “Judea and Samaria,” after their Biblical names. This area is mostly populated by Palestinians, many of whom live near or in the principal cities of the West Bank: Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron (al-Khalil), and Jericho, the original seat of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian government in the process of formation. Many of the Palestinians living on the West Bank can trace their ancestry back for generations, if not longer. Others fled to the West Bank from their homes in contemporary Israel as a result of the 1948 war.

Lowlands lie on either side of the plateau and to its south. To the west of the hilly area lies a coastal plain. The coastal plain provided two of the centers of Jewish immigration in the nineteenth century, one around Tel Aviv–Jaffa, the other about a third of the way up the coast to the port city of Haifa. To the east of the hilly area there is an area called the Jordan depression. This is not a psychological term – it refers to the fact that this area is low lying. The area is marked by the Dead Sea, which is below sea level – the lowest elevation of land on the planet. The Negev desert lies to the south of the hilly area. Until the establishment of the State of Israel, it was largely inhabited by bedouin. Further west, on the Mediterranean coast, lies the Gaza Strip, estimated to be the most densely populated territory on earth.

Although countless cities, towns, and villages dot this landscape, several in particular play an important role in our story. First, there are those that lie on the coastal plain. Furthest north is the port city of Acre. Acre was the principal harbor of the First Crusade, launched in 1096. The First Crusade was, for all intents and purposes, the only truly successful Crusade. It resulted in the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which lasted about a century. Zionist historians of an earlier generation found comfort in the kingdom’s longevity; Palestinian historians, in its eventual dislocation. Haifa, the principal seaport of Israel, lies to the south of Acre. It was originally built during the eighteenth century by an Ottoman vassal who sought to preserve his autonomy from the Ottomans by enriching himself and his principality by expanding trade with Europe. The port was modernized and enlarged during the British mandate period (1922–48), in part because it served as the terminus of an oil pipeline that stretched from Iraq to the Mediterranean. Further south still is Tel Aviv, which was founded in 1909 as a Jewish suburb of the Palestinian city of Jaffa. Tel Aviv is the largest city in contemporary Israel.



## THE LAND AND ITS LURE



Map 2. Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Jerusalem lies inland. The city was, according to the Bible, originally built by a people known as the Jebusites. Although “ownership” of the city is disputed, one untried solution would be to return the city to its original occupants, if any Jebusites can yet be found. For centuries, Jerusalem has been significant as a religious center and pilgrimage site. For Jews, it is the capital of David and Solomon’s kingdom and the site of the Western (Wailing) Wall, which is the only remaining remnant of the second temple. For Muslims, it is the site from which Muhammad ascended to heaven on his famous night journey. For Christians, it is the site of the Passion and Crucifixion.

The struggle for control over some or all of the territory of Palestine pits two nationalist movements against each other. In spite of their claims to uniqueness, all nationalist movements bear a remarkable

resemblance to one another. Each constructs a historical narrative that traces the unbroken lineage of a group – a nation – over time. Each endows the site of the nation's birth or greatest cultural or political moment with special meaning. Each uses its purported "special relationship" to some territory to justify its right to establish a sovereign state in that territory. This is where nationalism differs from mere nostalgia or collective memory: Whereas all sorts of religious and ethnic groups feel sentimental attachment to places, nationalism converts sentiment into politics. The adherents of a nationalist movement demand exclusive sovereignty over the designated territory and, for their nation, membership in the global order of nation-states. When it comes to connecting history and geography to political rights, neither Zionism nor Palestinian nationalism is a slacker.

Zionism views itself as the political expression of the Jewish nation. Indeed, it views itself as the fulfillment of Jewish history. In a manner analogous to most other nationalisms, Zionism has constructed a three-part narrative that traces the unbroken history of the Jewish nation from its birth and efflorescence in Palestine through a period of decay and degeneration in exile to a period of redemption at the hands of the modern Zionist movement and its return to its ancestral home in Palestine. For Zionists, the Jewish claim to Palestine can be found in the Bible and corroborative archaeological evidence. Most commonly, the Zionist narrative of Jewish history begins with Abraham and his descendants, who immigrated to Palestine in the second millennium BC, possibly from Iraq. The standard Zionist narrative considers the tenth-century BC reigns of King David and King Solomon the highpoint of the Jewish presence in Palestine. Theirs was a period of cultural and political glory, when the Jewish nation was politically united and religious authority radiated from the great temple in Jerusalem. But theirs was also a short-lived period, lasting a little less than seventy years, about half the length of the "golden age" of Greece.

Following the death of King Solomon, the Jewish community, save for eighty years under the rule of the Maccabees. In 63 BC, the Romans conquered Jerusalem, the capital of David and Solomon's kingdom, and in AD 135, after a series of revolts, they destroyed Jerusalem, enslaved or slaughtered its inhabitants, and dispersed most of the Jewish community. The Romans, drawing on the more extensive vocabulary of their Greek forerunners, renamed the reconquered province "Palestina"

(from which we get the names “Palestine” and its Arabic equivalent, “Filastin”). Without a central cultic site, the hub of Jewish life shifted to the diaspora – Jewish communities outside Palestine, including some that had existed in such places as Babylon and Alexandria even before Roman times. The diaspora – later to include communities in Europe and the Americas – would remain the central site of Jewish life until the emergence of the Zionist movement. Zionists claim that Zionism saved the scattered Jewish nation from decay from within and corruption from without and redeemed it by restoring it to its rightful home in Palestine.

Zionists do not weave their narrative of Jewish history from whole cloth, of course. Nationalist movements – be they Russian, French, or American – never do. Palestine was, after all, recalled in Jewish texts and rituals for centuries, and for centuries Jews proclaimed at their yearly Passover seders, “Next year in Jerusalem.” But there is a big difference between remembering Jerusalem and undertaking wholesale settlement activities in Palestine and eventually lodging a demand for Jewish self-determination in Palestine. What Zionists did, as all nationalist movements before and since have done, was to read their history selectively and draw conclusions from it that would not have been understandable to their ancestors before the advent of the modern era. The narrative of the Jewish people, as recounted by Zionists, situates periods of Jewish exile from Palestine (such as exile to Egypt and Babylon), dispersion (by the Assyrians), political division (most notably when the Jewish tribes divided themselves into two states, Israel and Judea), and wars with other inhabitants of the land (most notably the Philistines along the coast) within a framework that gives pride of place to ancient periods of political unity and dominance within Palestine. As the nineteenth-century French philosopher Ernest Renan once put it, “Getting history wrong is part of being a nation.”

A good example of this getting history wrong can be found in the standard Israeli textbook accounts of the siege of Masada in AD 74. Masada was a fortress near the Dead Sea where Jewish rebels made their last stand against the Romans. According to one account, written by the Roman historian Josephus, the Jews of Masada committed mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. The Romans, Josephus wrote, “encountering the mass of slain, instead of exulting as over enemies, admired the nobility of their resolve and the contempt of



Figure 2. In an official ceremony, skeletons identified as belonging to second-century Jewish rebels are reburied at Masada. (Source: David Rubinger/Corbis)

death displayed by so many in carrying it, unwavering, into execution.”

The ruins of Masada, excavated in 1963–5, provide what one historian has called “an elaborate and persuasive stage scenery for a modern passion play of national rebirth.”<sup>1</sup> The government of Israel considers Masada a historic monument. Maintained by the National Parks Authority, it is the site where members of the Israeli tank corps are sworn in. In 1968 (the year after the momentous and potentially cataclysmic Six-Day War), the Israeli government even organized a mass reburial of the skeletons found there. In the words of Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin,

Its scientific importance was known to be great. But more than that, Masada represents for all of us in Israel and for many elsewhere, archaeologists and laymen, a symbol of courage, a monument of our great national figures, heroes who chose death over a life of physical and moral serfdom.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Neil Asher Silberman, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Yigael Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (New York: Random House, 1966), 13.

The only problem with this rendition of the story of Masada is that it does not stand up to scrutiny. Our main source of the siege and mass suicide is Josephus's *The Jewish War*. Josephus was a Jewish turncoat who may have manufactured the entire story to slander a violent Jewish sect – either the better-known Zealots or the shadowy Sicarii (the “knife wielders”), one of which had control over the site during the period of the siege. By dwelling on the mass suicide, he very well may have been seeking to portray the barbarity of the besieged, not their heroism. After all, it was the same Masadans who apparently had raided a Jewish village nearby in AD 68, killing 700 Jewish men, women, and children. Hardly the stuff of national myth. Skeptics have also pointed out that archaeologists have found remains of pigs in kitchen areas (a clear violation of Jewish law that casts doubt on the very “Jewishness” of the site), that stories of mass suicide were as common in the classical period as serial killer movies are today, that in any event suicide is hardly condoned by Jewish law, and that no other Jewish text from the period recalls the incident. Yet, the slogan “Masada shall not fall again” still appears on coffee mugs and T-shirts on sale at souvenir shops near the site.

Investing sites such as Masada with special meaning reflects one way in which Zionists have used the Bible and archaeology to assert territorial claims. Another is through the act of naming. For Israelis, the West Bank town captured during the 1967 war is “Hebron,” the Hebrew name for what is called in Arabic “al-Khalil.” Hebron is mentioned in the Bible as one of the homes of the Jewish patriarch Abraham and as King David’s first capital. Interestingly, both the Hebrew and Arabic names refer to the same individual. The Bible refers to Abraham as the “friend” (*haver*) of God. Muslims agree: Their prophet Abraham was also the “friend” (*al-khalil*) of God.

The town of Hebron lies in an area that most observers call “the occupied West Bank” but that Israelis officially designate “Judea and Samaria” after the territory’s Biblical names. Calling the territory “the occupied West Bank,” of course, presumes the Palestinianness of the territory and the foreignness of the Israeli occupation. It thus serves to justify Palestinian aspirations to establish an independent entity there. On the other hand, by calling the territory “Judea and Samaria,” Israelis are calling attention to their Biblical roots in the land and their right to inhabit or control it.

The problem of dueling names is not restricted to geography. Each side in the struggle for Palestine also seeks to buttress its historic narrative by naming events as well. Hence, what for Israelis is their War of Independence is for Palestinians the *nakba* (disaster). For the former, the name denotes the fulfillment of Zionist goals. For the latter, the name denotes a very different result of the 1948 war: the destruction of the Palestinian community in the territory of Israel and the expulsion or flight of almost three-quarters of a million Palestinians. (As in the case of geographic names, readers would be well advised not to read significance into the names used to designate events in this book. I use what I find comfortable, and for me “Hebron” is more comfortable than “al-Khalil,” and “the occupied West Bank” is more comfortable than “Judea and Samaria.”)

If this account seems a bit one-sided so far, it is merely because most Palestinians see their connection to the territory of Palestine as self-evident. According to the 1968 version of the Charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, for example,

The Palestinians are those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in Palestine, regardless of whether they were evicted from it or stayed there. . . . [That] there is a Palestinian community and that it has material, spiritual, and historical connections with Palestine are indisputable facts.

Archaeology has been called the national sport of Israel. On the other hand, the popularity of archaeology within the Palestinian community has never been as intense. The most important reason for the seeming lack of interest is that most Palestinians would wince at the idea that they have to establish a connection between themselves and the land. What Biblical narrative and archaeological evidence is to Zionism, their presence in Palestine at the time of Zionist immigration is to Palestinians.

Nevertheless, a historical narrative complete with elisions similar to those found in Zionist histories can be found in the writings of some Palestinian nationalists as well. Like the Zionist narrative, the Palestinian narrative commonly begins in ancient times. Whereas Zionists begin their narrative with the migration of Abraham and his family to Palestine, the Palestinian narrative begins with the peoples he encountered there. Before the arrival of the Israelites, the ancient inhabitants of

the land were of two types. First, there were the Canaanites, who spoke a northern Semitic language similar to Arabic and Hebrew. Another group, the Philistines, came to Palestine in the twelfth century BC. Many archaeologists associate the Philistines with the so-called Peoples of the Sea, who spread havoc among Phoenician, Egyptian, and Hittite habitations along the eastern Mediterranean coast. Palestinian histories assert that, unlike the Canaanites, the Philistines were never conquered by the Israelites.

The Philistines have gotten a bad rap from history. Contrary to Biblical accounts, traces of their civilization, recently dug up, indicate that they had established a flourishing urban civilization at a time when the tribes of the Biblical patriarchs were still pastoral. As a matter of fact, the Philistines united themselves into a “league of five cities” – Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza – in the territory of present-day Palestine. (The use of the term “Philistine” to mean an uncouth person came much later. Its first recorded use was by a chaplain at the University of Jena who, in 1694, claimed that the townsmen of Jena who beat up his students were no better than the Philistines of the Bible.)

Over time, according to the narrative, inhabitants of the region were joined by large numbers of Arabs from the Arabian peninsula, who had begun to drift north even before Muhammad’s time and the first Islamic conquests. With those conquests, the inhabitants of Palestine became part of the great Islamic empire that stretched, at its height, from Spain to Afghanistan. Palestine played an important symbolic role in early Islam: The first Muslims prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, not Mecca and Medina, and, as previously mentioned, Jerusalem’s Temple Mount (called by Muslims the “Haram al-Sharif” [the Noble Sanctuary]), the site of the great Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosques, marks the spot of Muhammad’s ascent to heaven during his night journey.

As in the case of the Zionist narrative, the Palestinian narrative asserts that a period of decline followed the period of glory. According to some accounts, it was Turkic invasions of Arab lands that first reduced the area to decay. As T. E. Lawrence would later put it in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*,

Early in the Middle Ages, the Turks found a footing in the Arab states, first as servants, then as helpers, and then as a parasitic growth which choked the life out of the old body politic. The last phase was of enmity, when the Hulagus or Timurs sated their blood lust, burning

and destroying everything which irked them with a pretension of superiority... By stages the Semites of Asia passed under their yoke, and found it a slow death.<sup>3</sup>

We shall see in the next chapter how far this assessment of “the Turk” misses the mark.

As in the Zionist narrative, worse was yet to come: European imperialism, eventually in its Zionist form. The Ottoman Empire and the Arab successor states that took its place were too weak or too compliant to withstand the European onslaught, setting the stage for the Palestinian national disaster of 1948. Again, to quote Renan, “Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort.” Now it was the Palestinians who faced the prospect of diaspora life. But just as the Zionist narrative ends with the self-glorification of modern Zionism as the means for the redemption of the Jewish nation, the Palestinian national narrative concludes in a similar manner, with the awakening of the Palestinian nation to self-consciousness and its struggle to achieve national fulfillment in a state of its own.

Like the Zionists, the Palestinians have not woven their national myth from whole cloth. And like the Zionist myth, the Palestinian national myth contains its own share of elisions and historically doubtful assertions. But also like the Zionist myth, the Palestinian national myth has to be taken seriously because it inspires belief and action among its adherents.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

##### *General Works*

Abu-Lughud, Ibrahim, ed. *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971. Although by now a bit dated, a good anthology of articles on the social and political history of Palestine.

Gelvin, James L. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Puts the history of the Palestinian-Zionist/Israeli conflict in its Middle East and world historical contexts.

Laqueur, Walter, and Barry Rubin, eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*. New York: Penguin, 1995. Comprehensive compilation of documents relating to the conflict.

<sup>3</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 44.



- Owen, Roger. *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914*. London: I. B. Tauris, 1993. The gold standard for nineteenth-century Middle East political/economic history.
- Owen, Roger, and Sevet Pamuk. *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Chronological supplement to *The Middle East in the World Economy*; uses a “national economy” approach to post–World War I economics of the region.
- Smith, Charles D. *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001. One of the best comprehensive, blow-by-blow accounts of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- Smith, Pamela Ann. *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876–1983*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1984. Illustrated social history of Palestine and Palestinians; provides broad overview of over a century of Palestinian history.
- Tessler, Mark. *A History of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994. If not the most comprehensive one-volume account of the conflict, certainly the heaviest.

*Specialized Works*

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## CULTURES OF NATIONALISM

Nationalist narratives, such as those underlying Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, present us with a skewed and incomplete rendition of history. Two other factors further erode their usefulness. First, nationalist narratives assume that nations – such as the ones whose genealogy they describe – have existed throughout history. Nationalist movements, they assert, exist merely to bring those nations to a state of self-awareness. This assertion is far too modest. Nationalist movements do not bring preexisting nations to a state of self-awareness; nationalist movements create those nations. Second, nationalist narratives obscure or ignore the similarities between the nations whose history they claim to relate and other nations. This, of course, is done deliberately: By making it appear that its nation is distinctive, a nationalist narrative confirms the right of that nation to self-rule and sovereignty over a designated piece of real estate.

Zionism and Palestinian nationalism were cast in the same mold. Furthermore, while the advent of Zionism and the advent of a distinct Palestinian nationalism were never foregone conclusions, there can be no doubt that in a world in which nation-states provide the model for organizing political communities, Jews and the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine would claim to belong to some nation – either their own or someone else's – and espouse some nationalist creed. Again, this nationalist creed would be either their own or someone else's.

This last point is important and deserves to be underscored. As we shall see, Zionism emerged in the late nineteenth century for two reasons: Zionism was a reaction to European anti-Semitism and various nationalist movements that excluded Jews from political communities in the process of formation. But Zionism would have been impossible

had Jews not been subjected to the same transformative processes that had equipped their neighbors with expectations about the proper ordering of political communities. That in a world of nation-states Jews would become nationalists was inevitable. That they would become *Jewish* nationalists was not. The same with Palestinian nationalism, which did not become a mass phenomenon until well into the period between World War I and World War II. That Palestinians would travel a nationalist path was also to be expected. But as we shall see, the path they traveled to *Palestinian* nationalism was laden with obstacles and detours.

The emergence of nations and nationalism is inextricably linked to the emergence of the modern state in western Europe. The diffusion of nations and nationalism throughout the world is linked as well to the global spread of the modern state system. Before the nineteenth century, the predominant form of political organization in most of the world was either smaller than the modern state (city-states, principalities, etc.) or much larger (empires). It is empires that concern us here. Empires have existed for all of recorded history. These empires were not like modern overseas empires where a “metropolitan” or “home” state ruled over peoples (usually of a darker skin color) far away. Rather, the empires of the premodern and early modern eras ruled over expanses of adjoining territory. Thus, when thinking about premodern or early modern empires, it is more helpful to think of the Roman Empire in ancient times rather than the British Empire of the nineteenth century.

Although premodern and early modern empires came in various shapes and sizes, they all shared three characteristics. First, these empires did not much interfere in the day-to-day lives of their citizens. Overall, imperial rulers expected two things from their populations: They expected the populations they ruled to behave themselves by not rebelling against imperial control and to pay taxes or tribute to the state. Empires used the taxes and tribute they collected to pay for imperial defense, a centralized bureaucracy, and the deliberately awe-inspiring lifestyles of the rulers. As a matter of fact, it might be stated that empires were only as large as the territory from which they could extract taxes and tribute.

The second characteristic of empires was that they were governed by imperial elites who frequently were of a different religion, were of a different descent, and spoke a different language from those they ruled.

As any reader of Tolstoy knows, for example, the court language in imperial Russia was French, not the Russian spoken by peasants. In a similar vein, Turkish-speaking Muslim elites in the Ottoman Empire ruled over populations that spoke a variety of languages (Arabic, Greek, Armenian, etc.), practiced a variety of religions (Christianity in all its forms, Judaism, non-Sunni Islam), and included Slavs, Arabs, Kurds, and so on, as well as Turks.

Finally, premodern and early modern empires rarely attempted to impose any sort of uniformity on their populations. In other words, they did not attempt to standardize the language of their populations, nor did they attempt to impose on them cultural standards through a single educational system. There were two reasons for this. On the one hand, they could not. Before the advent of modern communications, transportation, and military technologies, central control was too weak. Commonly, imperial elites based in capital cities such as Istanbul relied on cooperative local leaders who acted as mediators with local populations in Baghdad or Damascus. On the other hand, imperial elites did not think of the state as we do. It never occurred to them that the population over which they ruled had to share common characteristics, had to have a common identity, or had to share the same culture as members of the imperial court. Such thinking would come later.

There were, of course, exceptions. Some empires, such as the Roman Empire, did attempt to promote a common “civic” religion. The Romans, for example, expected everyone to worship the Roman gods as a sign of loyalty to the empire, although they did not demand that the populations they governed abandon their local cults. This was why the Romans so brutally suppressed the Jewish revolt of the second century AD. Uniquely among Roman subjects, Jews refused to worship Roman gods alongside their own – an act that the Romans interpreted not so much as heresy but treason.

Because they were able to draw resources and manpower from vast expanses, empires were particularly powerful political units. And empires might have continued to be the most powerful political units had there not occurred a conceptual breakthrough among European statesmen and rulers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To gain advantage for their states in the highly competitive European environment, and to find a way out of the incessant religious wars that

divided and weakened their states, these statesmen and rulers championed a novel approach to statecraft. They sought to make loyalty to the sovereign the ultimate object of loyalty for imperial subjects – one that transcended their subjects’ loyalty to particular religious creeds. Rather than equating the strength of the state with the size of the territory from which they might extract taxes and tribute, statesmen and rulers came to believe that the strength of states lay in their “social power” – their ability to mobilize their populations and harness their energies for the common good. By inventing the notion that there existed something called a “population” that had a “common interest,” statesmen and rulers imbued the inhabitants of their states with an identity and purpose. Statesmen and rulers made this common identity and purpose concrete to their newly established populations in two ways: they expanded the disciplinary reach of their states to more effectively police, coordinate, and direct the day-to-day activities of their subjects, and they engaged them in common practical activities that made them cogs in a “national” machine. Thus were born standardized legal codes and educational systems, conscript armies, and even rudimentary national economic planning.

Over time, the populations engaged by states in common activities internalized the notion that they were part of unified societies, that these societies had identities of their own, and that these societies compelled loyalty and placed obligations on their citizenry. They also came to believe that, much like themselves, the rest of humanity is also naturally divided into unified societies – nations – each of which can be identified by one or more characteristics (shared language, ethnicity, religion, history) its citizenry holds in common, that the only type of government that can promote the common interest is national self-government, and that nations are to be based in specific territories that are the repository for the nations’ history and memory. These beliefs form the basis of what might be called a “culture of nationalism,” which, in turn, provides the environment in which specific nationalist movements might emerge. Some of these beliefs – the persistence of identities over time, the applicability of universal laws to human society – drew on ideas codified during the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. Others – such as the belief in discrete communities rooted in specific territories – drew on ideas codified by the Romantic movement, which, ironically, arose in Europe in reaction to the Enlightenment.

Although originating in Europe, the new concept of statecraft diffused worldwide, leaving in its wake nations bound together by nationalism. This diffusion took place in three ways. Sometimes, Europeans imposed their conceptions of state directly through colonialism, as the British did in the Indian subcontinent. Sometimes, would-be national leaders, inspired by borrowed ideals or compelled by the requirements of the world system of nation-states (in which they sought membership for their purported nations), applied the new rules for state building. Such was the case in the Balkans, for example. Finally, sometimes imperial elites, seeking to enhance imperial power or to defend themselves against European imperialism by emulating their adversaries, adopted the European model. Such was the case in the Ottoman Empire, in which the territory of Palestine lay, and in the Austrian Empire (called the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1867) and the Russian Empire, where the majority of Jews lived. The key to understanding the emergence of nationalism among both populations can be found in the transformation of these empires.

### THE NATIONALIZATION OF OTTOMAN PALESTINE

The territory that is now called Palestine was one of the core areas of Islam. In other words, Palestine was one of the areas first conquered by Arab Muslims following the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. In the wake of the conquests, most of the population of Palestine adopted Arabic as its language and much of the population adopted Islam as well.

At first, the Islamic world was politically united under a caliph, literally, the “successor” to Muhammad. However, the political unity of the Islamic world did not hold for long. Although the initial fissures in the Islamic empire were generated by internal fragmentation, beginning in the tenth century invaders from outside the Middle East, attracted by the wealth or lack of political cohesion of the Islamic domains or impelled by troubles back home, began to enter the region. Among them were Turkish-speaking invaders from the north who carved out a number of independent principalities and even empires in the Middle East.

Sometimes, bands of Turkic warriors would form in frontier areas and raid the domains of other principalities or empires. One such band formed adjacent to the frontier of the Byzantine Empire under the



Map 3. Ottoman Empire, circa 1850.

leadership of the legendary warrior Osman (1259–1326), the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. The Ottomans began their conquests in the far west of Anatolia (the site of the present-day Republic of Turkey) and in the Balkans. In 1453 the Ottomans captured Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and renamed it Istanbul. Since the Byzantine Empire was the successor to the Roman Empire, the Ottomans in effect put an end to an imperium that had ruled first from Rome, then from Constantinople, for over a millennium and a half. In 1516 the Ottomans began their conquest of the Middle East, establishing an empire that would last until 1918. At its height, the empire included much of the Balkans, the Middle East as far east as (but not including) Persia, parts of the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, and North Africa as far west as (but not including) Morocco.

The Ottoman Empire lasted for over 400 years. During that time, its territorial expanse waxed and waned, as did the control exercised by Istanbul over often far-flung provinces. And during that time the

relationship between the imperial government and the imperial subjects also changed dramatically, as the empire was forced to respond to both internal and external challenges. Thus, the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century was quite different from the empire of the nineteenth century. Suffice it to say that the Ottoman Empire of the early modern period – the period that stretched from the sixteenth century through at least the first half of the eighteenth – shared characteristics with other early modern empires. As in the case of other empires of the time, the principal external concerns of the Ottoman Empire were to expand the territory from which taxes and tribute might be collected and to defend its revenue-producing domains from rival empires. As in the case of other empires of the time, its principal internal concerns were to collect taxes and tribute from its population, protect the tax- and tribute-paying peasantry from the depredations of bedouin and bandits, ensure the safety and prosperity of commerce, deter urban unrest by ensuring urban areas were stocked with adequate supplies of goods, and prevent local notables and provincial functionaries, upon whom the empire depended for the collection of those taxes and tribute, from skimming off too much revenue for themselves or establishing independent power bases.

At the head of the Ottoman Empire stood the sultan, a descendent of Osman. As in the case of other early modern empires, religion provided one of the cornerstones of dynastic legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire. The empire was the preeminent (Sunni) Islamic empire of its time. Not only was *shari'a* – Islamic law – one of the sources for legal practice in the empire (the others being local customary law and *kanun*, or law derived from imperial pronouncements), and not only did the sultan occasionally lay claim to the title of caliph (although the occasions were rarer than one might expect), the empire included within its domains the two holy cities of Arabia, Mecca and Medina, and the holy city of Jerusalem.

Possession of the three holy cities increased the importance of Palestine in the minds of imperial elites. The Ottoman sultans invested great value in the annual *hajj* (pilgrimage) caravan that journeyed from Istanbul to Damascus to Egypt and Arabia. Supplying the caravan was a great economic boon to those who lived in areas, like Palestine, through which the caravan passed. Furthermore, when the government in



Istanbul was strong and financially solvent, it set up military outposts in Palestine to protect the caravan from bedouin raids. Because the imperial military presence increased rural security during these times, both the area under cultivation and the rural population expanded. Ottoman sultans also sponsored public works in Jerusalem. Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled from 1520 to 1566, for example, attempted to demonstrate his religiosity by reconstructing and refurbishing the city. He rebuilt the walls of the city (which exist to this day) and constructed aqueducts, fountains, hospitals, and schools.

(Although “high” Islam was an important source of legitimacy for the Ottoman state, popular belief and practice in Palestine, as elsewhere, varied widely. An eighteenth-century French traveler to Palestine describes the following incident:

“Why,” asked a bedouin shaykh, “do you wish to return among the Franks? Since you have no aversion to our manners; since you know how to use the lance and manage a horse like a bedouin, why don’t you stay among us? We shall give you cloaks, a tent, a virtuous and young bedouin girl, and a good blood mare. You shall live in our house.”

“But do you not know,” replied I, “that, born among the Franks, I have been educated in their religion? In what light will the Arabs view an infidel, or what will they think of an apostate?”

“And do not you yourself perceive,” said he, “that the Arabs live without troubling themselves either about the Prophet, or the Qur’an? Every man with us follows the direction of his conscience. Men have a right to judge of actions, but religion itself must be left to God alone.”

This tale is obviously as embroidered as the cloaks promised the traveler, but there is a grain of truth to it. Educated and uneducated, urban and rural Muslims naturally differed in their approaches to Islam. The attempt to impose a rigid Islamic orthodoxy and “Islamic lifestyle” on all Muslim Palestinians would come only with the arrival of the modern age.)

Whatever Palestine’s religious significance, during the first centuries of Ottoman control the hand of the imperial government rested lightly on its population, as it did on the population in most of the empire. Not only was a vast majority of the population of Palestine rural – as late as 1922, 65 percent of the population lived in rural areas – it was heavily concentrated on or near the hilly spine of inland Palestine. Living on